

Message Text

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ACTION DPW-01

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3183

INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR EI VS

SUBJ: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL QUERY ABOUT CIVILIAN PRISONERS
IN VIETNAM

REF: DUBLIN 0389

SUGGEST DEPARTMENT MAY WISH TO USE FOLLOWING SUGGESTED DRAFT IN
REPLYING TO LETTER FROM T. C. KINGSMILL-MOORE:

DEAR MR. KINGSMILL-MOORE:

I HAVE BEEN ASKED TO REPLY TO YOUR LETTER OF JANUARY 30 TO
PRESIDENT NIXON CONCERNING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT
OF JANUARY 27, 1973 AND THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE OF JUNE 13, 1973
WITH RESPECT TO THE EXCHANGE OF CIVILIAN PRISONERS IN SOUTH VIET-
NAM. SINCE YOU WROTE, THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM TOOK AN INITIATIVE
WHICH RESULTED IN AN EXCHANGE OF CIVILIAN PRISONERS BETWEEN THE
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM AND THE "PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY
GOVERNMENT." WHEN THIS EXCHANGE WAS COMPLETED ON MARCH 7 ALL
5,081 COMMUNIST PRISONERS HELD BY THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
ELIGIBLE FOR RELEASE UNDER THE PARIS AGREEMENT AND THE JOINT COMMU-
NIQUE WERE GIVEN THEIR FREEDOM.

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I AM SURE YOU KNOW THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM AND

CERTAIN GROUPS WHO ARE SEEKING TO DESTROY SUPPORT FOR VITALLY NEEDED U.S. ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM HAVE MOUNTED A WORLD-WIDE PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN TO DEFAME PRESIDENT THIEU AND HIS GOVERNMENT. THEY HAVE ASSIDUOUSLY SPREAD THE GROTESQUE CANARD THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM HOLDS 200,000 "POLITICAL PRISONERS" IN ITS JAILS. BECAUSE OF THE GREAT INTEREST AROUSED BY THIS CHARGE, OUR EMBASSY AT SAIGON CONDUCTED A THOROUGH-GOING STUDY OF THE PENAL SYSTEM OF SOUTH VIETNAM AND REPORTED THAT THE TOTAL NUMBER OF PRISONERS OF ALL DESCRIPTIONS IS ABOUT 35,000. SINCE THE CURRENT PRISONER EXCHANGE THIS FIGURE HAS BEEN REDUCED TO ABOUT 31,500. OUR EMBASSY ALSO REPORTS THAT SO FAR NOT EVEN ONE PRISONER HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED WHO WOULD FIT THE DEFINITION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN YOUR LETTER -- "PEOPLE WHO ARE IMPRISONED SOLELY BECAUSE THEY HOLD VIEWS WHICH ARE UNPOPULAR WITH THOSE WHO KEEP THEM IN PRISON."

I WISH I COULD REPORT TO YOU THAT THE SAME IS TRUE OF THE "PRG." THE DISHEARTENING FACT IS THAT MANY THOUSANDS OF CIVILIAN PRISONERS REMAIN CAPTIVE IN THE COMMUNIST AREA OF SOUTH VIETNAM. IN THE RECENT PRISONER EXCHANGE THE "PRG" DID NOT RELEASE, OR EVEN GIVE AN ACCOUNTING FOR, OVER 70,000 CIVILIANS CAPTURED OR ABDUCTED BY COMMUNIST FORCES DURING THE LONG WAR IN VIETNAM. SOME OF THESE UNFORTUNATES ARE CIVIL SERVANTS OF THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT, MOST OF THEM ARE ORDINARY CIVILIANS. UNHAPPILY, MANY MAY HAVE DIED DURING OR AFTER CAPTURE. THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM HAS RECORDS GIVING THE NAMES, ADDRESSES AND DATES OF CAPTURE OR DISAPPEARANCE OF THESE PEOPLE. STUDIOUSLY IGNORING THIS EVIDENCE, THE "PRG" DENIES KNOWLEDGE OF ANY MORE THAN THE 637 THEY ACCOUNTED FOR DURING THE RECENT PRISONER RELEASES.

WHILE I UNDERSTAND THAT HANOI HAS NOT RESPONDED TO PREVIOUS INQUIRIES BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, I SUGGEST YOU STILL MAY WISH TO WRITE THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM, WHICH CONTROLS THE "PRG", ABOUT THIS TRAGIC SITUATION. THE LEADERS OF THE DRV WOULD REJECT ANY SUGGESTION FROM THE USG ON SUCH MATTERS, BUT THEY MIGHT HEED AN APPEAL BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, WHICH IS SO WIDELY AND JUSTLY KNOWN FOR ITS WORK IN ALLEVIATING HUMAN MISERY EVERYWHERE. UNLESS THOSE OF US WHO HAVE THE POWER TO DO SO SPEAK OUT, THESE SILENT VICTIMS OF WAR AND TERROR IN SOUTH VIETNAM STAND VIRTUALLY NO CHANCE OF REGAINING THEIR FREEDOM AND THEIR FAMILIES WILL REMAIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FOREVER IGNORANT OF THEIR FATE.

I HOPE THIS INFORMATION WILL BE OF HELP TO YOU AND AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IN YOUR IMPORTANT WORK.
SINCERELY,
MARTIN

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